



2000 YEAR END REPORT

U. S. SENATOR
CHUCK HAGEL

February, 2001

Dear Friends,

As we begin this new Congress with a new President, I want to give you a 2000 Congressional Report, to keep you informed on some of the action taken last year on issues of importance to our state and nation.

I look forward to visiting with many of you throughout the year in Nebraska and Washington.

Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

Senator Hagel
tours a wheat
field south of
Paxton with
Nebraska farmer
Vance Peak.



MAJOR ISSUES IN CONGRESS IN 2000

Agriculture

Crop Insurance- Last year, Congress reformed the nation's crop insurance system. I was an original cosponsor of this legislation. This law will help agricultural producers manage risk by allowing them to make long-term market decisions without being devastated by short-term economic downturns.

Trade- It is critical for Nebraska agriculture that the U.S. remain active in opening new markets around the world. One of the most important debates held in the Congress last year was over granting Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) to China. Granting PNTR to China will provide growth opportunities to American businesses and farmers, and help stabilize Asia and the Pacific. The granting of PNTR is clearly in the best interests of Nebraska, America and the world.

Sanctions Reform- In a significant victory for our agricultural producers, last year an exemption for food and medicine in our unilateral sanctions was enacted into law. I was one of the original sponsors of this legislation. It opens up new markets for the sales of our grain, meat and other agricultural prod-

ucts. For years we've been hurting American farmers by shutting them out of these markets. We should not use food and medicine as foreign policy tools. They are the most fundamental of human needs. I will continue working on ways to reform U.S. sanctions policy. Last year I was inducted into the Consumers for World Trade Hall of Fame for my leadership on trade issues.

Agricultural Funding- 2000 was an especially difficult year for Nebraska agriculture. Like much of the Midwest, Nebraska suffered from a devastating drought and low commodity prices. In response, I supported Congress' approval of \$14 billion in emergency agricultural spending in 2000, an estimated \$1.6 billion for emergency crop loss disaster assistance, and \$490 million to the Livestock Assistance Program (LAP) to ease the burden on those producers hardest hit by natural disasters.

Last year I received the Golden Plow Award from the American Farm Bureau Federation, a national award given yearly to two members of Congress for their leadership on agricultural issues.

Food Quality Protection Act- In an effort to protect both producers and

consumers, I introduced the Regulatory Openness and Fairness Act. This legislation directs the EPA to use sound science in implementing the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) governing pesticide use by farmers. It is important that we ensure a safe food supply while protecting agriculture producers from unnecessary regulatory burdens. I will re-introduce this legislation this year.

Education

There is no issue more important to the future of Nebraska's children than education. Last year, as a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, I had the opportunity to work with Nebraska parents and educators on their priorities. The FY 2001 Education Budget includes a 15% increase in the amount of money Nebraska will get in federal education funds.

Last year, I cosponsored the Rural Education Initiative to boost the amount of flexible federal dollars that small rural schools receive. This was included in the final appropriations bill passed by Congress and signed by the President. Also included was a provision to

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MAJOR ISSUES IN CONGRESS IN 2000

Senator Hagel celebrates the 25th Anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act with students from Prescott Elementary in Lincoln.



increase federal aid to military and Indian schools (Impact Aid) by \$88 million. Nebraska received \$18.6 million in Impact Aid, an increase of roughly \$6 million. Last year, I was honored by the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools and I received the Champions for the Children Award from the Bellevue Public Schools for my work on Impact Aid.

In 2000, the Senate also passed a measure to allow individuals to place as much as \$2,000 per year, per child, in an Education Savings Account that earns tax-free interest. I cosponsored and voted in favor of this measure but it was not considered by the House. It will be reintroduced this year as part of the tax package President Bush sends to Congress. Last year, I also cosponsored Straight A's legislation that would give participating states increased flexibility with federal funds in exchange for meeting specific goals. I will cosponsor similar legislation in this Congress.

Education in Nebraska- Last year, I was pleased to visit colleges, high schools, middle schools and elementary schools all over Nebraska. It was a special honor to address the Lincoln Public School Board on the 25th Anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA ensures all children receive an appropriate public education, regardless of disabilities. Congress has increased funding for IDEA by 174% over the past four years, but appropriations have fallen short of the original commitment Congress made to fully fund IDEA. I will continue to work to ensure that Congress fulfills its pledge.

Health Care

Prescription Drug Coverage for Medicare- Last year, I introduced (and will reintroduce in this Congress) a bill to give all seniors enrolled in Medicare privately negotiated discounts on prescription drugs. Under my bill all seniors would get a discount on their prescription drugs and those with low and middle incomes would have a cap on their yearly drug costs. Seniors would pay no monthly premiums and the greatest protection would go to those who need it the most. I hope that my bill can form the basis for a compromise on this critical issue in 2001.

Medicare Reform- In an effort to bring much needed reform to Medicare, I cosponsored the bipartisan Breaux-Frist Medicare Reform proposal. We must address Medicare's financial and foundational problems in order to ensure that the program will be there in the future. The Breaux-Frist proposal will give seniors more options, and make Medicare more efficient by encouraging greater market-based participation. We will reintroduce this bill in this Congress.

Protecting Healthcare Providers in Nebraska- The protection of rural and teaching hospitals is an issue of great importance to Nebraskans. I have continued to meet with the management teams of hospitals throughout Nebraska, and cosponsored legislation to suspend any further reductions in payments to teaching hospitals as well as legislation to increase Medicare payments provided to rural hospitals. Last year we restored \$35 billion to Medicare providers.

Reimbursements to Nebraska hospitals will increase by approximately \$90 million over 5 years.

Fragile X and Cancer- In 2000, I sponsored legislation to increase research into Fragile X, one of the leading causes of mental retardation, and cosponsored legislation to increase access to breast and cervical cancer treatment. Both pieces of legislation were signed into law. In 2000, I was privileged to receive The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation's Distinguished Public Service Award for my leadership and work in helping improve quality health care and helping provide additional funding for medical research.

Campaign Finance Reform

Our federal campaign finance system is broken. The campaigns of 2000 proved once again the need for reform. Exorbitant non-disclosed amounts of money were spent in the 2000 election, further alienating the public trust. Last year I introduced The Open and Accountable Campaign Financing Act of 2000 – a bipartisan bill to: (1) codify and expand disclosure requirements on campaign contributions and political advertisements, (2) limit and regulate “soft money” contributions and (3) increase individual contribution limits, indexing these limits to the rate of inflation. I have reintroduced my bill in the new Congress. Campaign Finance Reform will be considered early in 2001, and I believe we will pass and the President will sign a good campaign finance reform bill.

Federal Budget/Social Security

Much of the debate in the Congress last year focused on what to do with “projected” surpluses in the federal budget. All surpluses in the General Treasury, not the Social Security Trust Fund, should be used to continue paying down the national debt, reform medicare and cut taxes. Last year, the government paid off \$223 billion of the national debt from the non-Social Security surplus.

All Social Security surpluses should be used only for Social Security. We must get at Social Security

reform so that it remains solvent as increasing numbers of Americans move towards retirement adding millions of recipients onto the Social Security rolls.

Repeal of Social Security Earnings Test

Last year, I cosponsored legislation signed into law that repealed the earnings limit on Social Security recipients between the ages of 65 and 70. The Social Security earnings test was unfair and a disincentive for seniors to work. This change has allowed seniors to go back to work or continue to work and not worry about losing their Social Security benefits.

Tax Relief

In order to minimize the tax burden on working Americans and increase fairness in the tax code, I cosponsored legislation which passed Congress to eliminate both the marriage penalty and estate taxes.

The estate tax is an especially important issue for Nebraska because it directly effects the ability of families to pass their business and agricultural operations on from one generation to the next without ruinous and unfair taxes being heaped on the heirs. Unfortunately, this legislation was vetoed by President Clinton. I believe we will eliminate both of these regressive and unfair taxes this year and cut taxes across the board, knowing President Bush will sign tax cut legislation.

Immigration

The American Competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century Act was signed into law last year. I cosponsored this legislation because it addresses two areas of concern in Nebraska: the need for high-tech workers and the backlog of immigration cases. By granting temporary visas to high-tech professionals, it will allow Nebraska businesses having trouble finding high-tech workers due to the low unemployment rate to continue growing. It also requires the Attorney General to address the backlog of immigration cases. Last year, at the urging of the Nebraska congressional delegation, the INS committed to begin the construction of a new INS district office in Omaha.

I also supported legislation that Congress passed that will allow

families to remain intact while awaiting pending residence applications. This legislation provides temporary visas to spouses, children, and fiances of legal immigrants. These common sense changes will greatly improve the immigration process.

Military

National defense is our country's highest priority. The world remains an uncertain and dangerous place. Our men and women in uniform must have the resources and support they need so that we are prepared to meet the security challenges that come with a new borderless world. Last year, we increased the National Defense Budget by \$15 billion. We will continue to increase our commitment to national defense in this Congress.

Pay Raise for Military Personnel-

A provision to provide a 3.7% pay raise and reduce out-of-pocket housing costs for military personnel was included in the 2001 Defense Authorization Act. I cosponsored this provision, which went into effect on January 1, 2001.

National Missile Defense-

Last year saw more debate over the idea of National Missile Defense (NMD). Wisely, President Clinton chose to allow President Bush to determine the course we will follow as we pursue NMD this year. As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, I will remain actively involved in helping lead this debate and continue to urge that we lay the proper technological and diplomatic groundwork as we move forward in implementing

NMD as an important part of our foreign and defense policy.

Veterans Issues

A measure of a society can be found in the quality of its treatment of those who have made sacrifices in order to build a better future. As our veterans grow fewer in number, it is critical that we make their remembrance and care a national priority. Last year, I was honored to receive the Legislator of the Year Award from the Vietnam Veterans of America and the Commander's Award from AMVETS.

Veteran's Healthcare- Last year, the President signed the 2001 Defense Authorization Act into law. I cosponsored a provision of this bill that allows families of active duty and retired service members to pay less for health care. It also allows first time military retirees to remain in the military's Tricare insurance program for life, instead of being forced into the less generous Medicare program.

Memorial Day- Last year I sponsored a resolution enacted into law to institute a National Moment of Remembrance. It was designed to encourage Americans to take time out from their busy lives to appropriately honor those lost in the pursuit of peace and liberty around the world. The President will issue a proclamation encouraging all Americans to observe a moment of remembrance at 3:00 p.m. (local time) every Memorial Day.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Edu-

cation Center- In 2000, I introduced legislation to create an education

center at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The center will feature displays that examine the Vietnam War era and the history of The Wall. It will focus on young people to help them better understand the Memorial and to provide context for their visits to the other military memorials on the mall. I will reintroduce this legislation this year.



Senator Hagel visits with a constituent at Norfolk Senior Center in August.

MAJOR ISSUES IN CONGRESS IN 2000

Oral History Project- Last year, I was a cosponsor of legislation signed into law to establish a collection of video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials from American war veterans at the Library of Congress. The goal of this project is to use available technology to preserve first-hand accounts of those who have gone to war for our country.

Climate Change

Last year I represented the U. S. Senate as an observer at the global warming treaty negotiations in The Hague, Netherlands. Again, attempts failed to craft an agreement to implement the Kyoto Protocol.

The Kyoto Protocol is the wrong approach to this issue. It excludes more than 130 developing nations, including China and India, and would seriously undermine America’s economic growth and our global competitiveness.

There are many things we can do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions without submitting our country to the United Nations mandates in the Kyoto Protocol. Among the measures we have pursued is the contribution of carbon “sinks” – carbon that is absorbed from the atmosphere by forests, rangelands and croplands. This is important for Nebraska agriculture.

Along with several of my Senate colleagues, I have sponsored legislation to increase research and development for climate change, to increase investment in clean energy technology, and to encourage greater voluntary efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I will continue to seek these common sense solutions as we move forward on this issue.

Energy

Energy may be the most urgent and important issue we face in America over the next few years. On September 22, 2000, I stood on the floor of the U.S. Senate and addressed America’s non-existent energy policy.

The U.S. needs to develop an energy policy to begin reducing our dependence on foreign oil and prepare our country for the future.

We need to increase the safe and environmentally sound production of our domestic oil and natural gas resources. At the same time, we must seek to diversify our en-

ergy portfolio and find ways to use our energy more efficiently. We must also expand the production and use of renewable sources of energy such as ethanol, solar power, clean coal, nuclear power, wind and hydroelectric power. Last year, I was a cosponsor of a bill to establish environmentally feasible ways to develop the coastal plain of Alaska for oil exploration. I plan to support similar responsible legislation this year.

Our nation’s future is directly connected to energy capacity. President Bush and Congress must lead in shaping a new, workable and relevant energy policy.

Senator Hagel speaks at the Scottsbluff Centennial 2000 Memorial Day program.



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